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AP Language and Composition

4/19/09

### Gender Essay

Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a great deal of things changed in America. Perhaps one of the most prominent changes during this period was in how people viewed each other, either along racial or gender lines. A prime example of this in the media of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is the classic movie Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark. Filmed in 1981, this movie created one of the most iconic film characters of all time, while simultaneously defying several stereotypes that while less prevalent when the movie was made, were very strong during the time period in which the movie was set.

First of all, what is a stereotype? The American Heritage Dictionary defines it as “One that is regarded as embodying or conforming to a set image or type.” The use of generalities and stereotypes in movies is a common way that film makers establish a character’s traits and personality, for example, “women with blonde hair are less intelligent” (The Concerns About Movies) But what about broader gender stereotypes in movies, such as “men are more concerned about their careers,” while women “are generally more concerned with personal relationships?” (Talking to Kids About Gender Stereotypes)

The main character of the Raiders of the Lost Ark is, of course, Indiana Jones. We now know Indiana Jones as the classic action hero, being dragged behind trucks and using his bullwhip in ridiculous and awesome ways to save the day. However, at the time the movie was released, he was

totally different from most silver-screen action heroes of his time. First of all, he has two completely different personas: one as an action-adventurer who goes gallivanting around the world in search of fantastical treasures while also managing to get the girl along the way; another as a quiet, reserved, and intelligent university professor who works for a museum.

The first part of Indiana's personality would of course be defined today as "stereotypical"; and let's face it who wouldn't want to be Indiana Jones? Over time this part of his character's personality has become the standard in movie heroes. Just look at movies like *The Mummy* and even *James Bond*; despite *James Bond* being much smoother the same action-hero motif is still there.

The parts where Indy breaks the now-stereotypical action hero, namely the scenes where he plays a seemingly quiet professor (I doubt his students would ever guess he is a treasure hunter with no qualms about killing on the side) are the elements of the movie that establish his character in defiance of stereotypical male action heroes. Generally, they are not expected to be smart, well dressed, or otherwise like Indy's professor side to his character.

There is at least one other character in the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* that both defines and defies gender stereotypes. Marian, Indiana's love interest/partner, occasionally plays to the stereotypical women in the film. For instance, in the scene where she is captured by the Nazis and their henchman, she is the basic "in distress" women, shouting "Indy!" as she is carried away and Harrison Ford proceeds to

fulfill the typical male role and chase them all through the city, shooting bad guys and using his bullwhip to amazing effect.

However, as his partner, Marian totally defies the typical woman stereotype. In one scene, actually the first scene in which we meet Marian, we find her in a shot-drinking contest with a very large man in the bar she owns. First of all, such a situation would be absolutely appalling to other women in the time period in which the movie is set (before World War II). Secondly, she actually wins, drinking so many shots that her opponent passes out attempting to match her.

Marian does fulfill the stereotypical role of women in films in at least one aspect, that is, her and Indiana's obvious romantic interest. From the scene where they meet in the bar, where they discuss their previous relationship (even though "tough" Marian basically bosses Indy around), this interest is a plot point. Marian says that her and Indy's previous relationship was wrong (she says "I was young," that "it was wrong and you knew it!" and other similar lines during the conversation). She paints herself in this particular scene as a woman who has been taken advantage of, a stereotypical point of women in movies in her position. While not really a stereotypical role of women, this is a theme that has appeared in many movies where an adventuring male character requires the aid of a woman who he has some sort of past connection with.

Several other characters in the movie also appeal to gender stereotypes in their roles. The villain Belloq, for example, is the typical womanizer character by the way he interacts with Marian, although she is quick to realize this and take advantage of it.

Belloq, like Indy, perfectly captures the adventurous (although in this case villain) and tough male stereotypes.

Another supporting character that falls into an extremely stereotypical role is the man that Indiana fights in the sequence involving the airplane. This man is the perfect example of the male tough-guy stereotype, almost taken to the absolute limit. His strange desire to fight Indy, even though he has no idea who he is or what he is doing (he only sees Indy punch the planes mechanic while attempting to board it) is the male-fighter label. He continues to force Indy to fight him, completely oblivious to the planes propellers spinning near them and the plane's motion, which eventually results in his death. During his short screen time (and life) this character is an example of a stereotype taken to the limit, it actually ends up becoming almost comical as we watch him fight for no apparent reason.

Overall, I think this movie is unique because its two main characters, Indiana Jones and Marian Ravenwood, both define and defy the gender stereotypes of the time. Indiana is a stereotypical male hero, but at the same time he is a quiet professor and actually a very deep well-developed character, which defies common stereotypes of men, at least in movies of the time. Even though avoiding stereotyping characters is one of the media's higher concerns now, even involving the law (Hollywood Reporter), Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark managed to create unique, non-stereotypical characters in a time when using stereotypes to define characters was commonplace. Marian manages to be both a tough persona and hero herself, but occasionally takes on a female stereotypical "damsel-in-distress" role. I think this

strange combination, for both of their parts, actually adds a great deal of character depth to the movie by simultaneously challenging and conforming to gender stereotypes.

Works Cited

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